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H I N T S

TOWARDS

THE IMROVEMENT

OF THE

C O U N T I E S

OF

ROSS AND CROMARTY.



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THE IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

COUNTIES

OF

ROSS AND CROMARTY.

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

BY THE REV. JOHN DOWNIE,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT URRAY.

Theologian

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HINTS

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THE IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

COUNTIES



ROSS AND CROMARTY

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND

BY THE REV. JOHN DOWNIE
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT DUNDEE

GLASGOW

PRINTED BY J. DICKSON, AT THE GOSPEL

(11)

TO THE

L A D I E S

OF THE

C O U N T I E S

OF

ROSS AND CROMARTY.

ON reading Sir John Sinclair's Report of the Agriculture of the Northern Counties, I wrote the following Letter to a Friend, containing my thoughts on that subject. It is now out of my hands. The partiality of my Friend to the intention of the Letter, makes him think the Publication of it may be useful. He calls upon me to send him a Dedication to some person or persons able and willing to give it effect. I can think of none so proper for that

that purpose as your Ladyships. The design will naturally recommend itself to your attention. It is the exercise of Charity in its most amiable form, and in the most beneficial manner. Often have your eyes been filled with tears at the sight of hunger, cold, and nakedness; and as often have you given relief as far as circumstances would admit. But the objects are more numerous than the fund of charity can supply. A greater number languish in secret, from modest pride, than solicit alms at your doors. Your parish-ministers, who frequent the huts of the wretched, will confirm this truth. The introduction of manufactures is the only possible mode of diffusing plenty among this class. Cheerfulness, contentment, and honesty, naturally accompany industry and plenty. I cannot therefore entertain a doubt of your inclination to use your influence in rendering the condition of the poor more comfortable. A long acquaintance with human nature informs me, how feelingly alive you are to distress, and what pleasure you take in acts of beneficence. Permit me therefore, with humility, to put the following Paper under your protection, which is meant solely to gratify your charitable wishes.

wishes. If you deign to contenance it, its success is sure. I need not add, that your feelings will approve of your zeal. The present generation will bless you, and future generations will revere your memory.

Should the Gentlemen, by your means, be prevailed upon to take this matter into serious consideration, it is my opinion, that industry may be introduced, at a trifling expence to individuals.

I have the honour to be, with profound esteem,

LADIES,

Your most obedient

And humble Servant,

JOHN DOWNIE.

URRAY, Jan. 5. }
1797.

HINTS

with. If you bring to me the
line, I need not ask that your letters will
prove of your faith. The present generation will
blame you, and future generations will reverse your
memory.

Should the Government, by your aid, be per-
mitted to take the matter into their con-
sideration, it is my opinion that industry may be in-
creased, and a million of people to individuals.

I have the honor to be with profound esteem,

Yours most obedient

And humble servant

JOHN BOWNE

HINTS

H I N T S

TOWARDS THE

IMPROVEMENT OF THE COUNTIES

OF

ROSS AND CROMARTY.

SIR,

I HAVE perused, with great pleasure, Sir John Sinclair's Report of the Agriculture of the Northern Counties; and join with every lover of his country, in rejoicing at the laudable exertions now making to meliorate the state of human nature amongst us; and that a man of Sir John's knowledge, and unremitting activity, is at the head of a public Board, so friendly to the interests of virtue, industry, and social life. Were I capable of adding the smallest article to the stock of knowledge necessary for advancing improvement, no man is better disposed to impart it.—From this disposition alone, I venture on a few strictures, which, if you think they will answer any useful purpose, you are welcome to dispose of them as you see proper; if otherwise, they can do no hurt.

The narrow circle in which I move confines my local observations to the western part of the county

of Ross, where I live ; having only a slender knowledge of the eastern part, except by hearsay, and the accurate Report above mentioned.

The gentlemen in this neighbourhood began to plant about forty years ago, and still continue that improvement. Some years hence, it is to be hoped, every black spot now in view will be covered with wood. Colonel Mackenzie of Seaforth has planted out some square miles, with all the native timbers, and introduced several exotics. The other gentlemen around vie with each other in beautifying the country, and bettering their estates, by this species of improvement ; and, at the same time, labour extensive farms, and bring waste ground into culture, by the most approved methods. But the great body of the arable land is in the hands of the common people, and in most instances laboured in as wretched a manner as it was a century ago ; except that potatoes have been introduced within the last thirty years ; which, by supplying a principal part of the food of the inhabitants, enable them to pay their rents.

The obstacles to agriculture are very judiciously narrated, p. 122. of the Report, and bear hard both on landlord and tenant. But the question is, how to obviate them. Some of them are in the power of the landlords themselves to remedy ; as, payment of the rents in kind—personal services—and short leases. It were to be wished, that each landlord would obviate them on his own estate, as far as local circumstances will admit. The other obstacles do not seem capable

capable of being so easily removed; as, the smallness of farms—thirlage—and the low price of grain by act of parliament. Should the enlargement of farms become general, it will bring the humanity of landlords into question. For the present tenants, the aborigines of the soil must be turned off, as they have but slender capitals, and are bred to no other occupation, whereby to procure a livelihood; besides that advancing the price of bread by a law, will make it still more difficult for them to subsist. Thirlage indeed can be removed, without material injury to the proprietors of mills, by an act of parliament; and the same law can settle the wages to be paid to millers for their labour.

Another obstacle to agricultural improvement has started up of late; I mean the high wages exacted by farm-servants, arising partly from recruiting for the army, but principally from the improved state of agriculture in the southern counties. A farmer who labours 300 acres with six servants, can afford higher wages than a farmer of twenty acres. But this last must give nearly the same wages, otherwise the servant leaves him to go south, though he must do double the work there he does at home. This operates as a heavy land-tax over the whole country, and carries off several of our most useful hands. This grievance, however, arising from the industry and wealth of our southern neighbours, cannot be easily removed, without infringing on personal liberty.

Another cruel obstacle to improvement, is the general poverty of our people. From the account given in Sir John Sinclair's Report of the Tenantry of the Black Isle, which will, in a great measure, fit the bulk of the common people in both counties, it is evident they have not ability to improve the lands already in culture, even had they skill and encouragement beyond what they have; far less to improve the tracts of waste ground on their respective farms. By living on potatoes for seven or eight months of the season, they contrive to pay their rents, in order to preserve a home; but it cannot be expected they will improve the soil, while their depressed circumstances oblige them to scourge it every year for present subsistence.

For the most part, the improvement of the waste lands is intrusted to mailers or cottagers, who farm a small spot of muir, with the view of building a hut for the family, and to improve the soil round it. The same poverty which makes a man at first put up with that situation, hinders him from making any effectual progress in the improvement of the soil: For as the maintenance of the family depends on the daily labour of the husband alone, he cannot spare time for labouring the ground, except by fits and starts, which in many years will bring only a very small space into culture. He cannot spare money for trenching it by others; and if he could afford money, it would answer no end, unless he could likewise afford to bring lime from Sunderland: for his own efforts are sufficient for all the manure

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he can procure, which consists of the heap of ashes before his door ; to obtain which, he hurts the surrounding muir, more perhaps than the value of his improvement, by peeling the surface for fuel, and digging pits for his dung-hill.

But in order to get out of this labyrinth of obstacles, in which our agriculture is involved, it may not be amiss to observe the management of our southern neighbours, in circumstances exactly similar. At the union of the two kingdoms, all the country on this side of the Grampian hills, was in the same state in which we now are. In Aberdeenshire, for instance, agriculture was carried on in as slovenly a manner as it is now with us, and the people equally attached to their own method. I myself remember when a field of sown grass was rarely to be seen, and when a stone of hay was not to be had in a public stable in the town. But if a gentleman had a field of turnip, it was reckoned a shrewd sign of his being whimsical. The benefit, however, of these improvements, was instantly felt ; and, as if by instantaneous concert, every proprietor improved the farm he possessed, as is now done here ; while the common people probably would have continued tenacious in the practice of their ancestors, had not manufactures been introduced amongst them. Every agricultural improvement in that country, except on gentlemen's farms alone, owes its origin to this source.

The knitting of stockings was introduced in that place by the officers ladies of Cromwell's army ;

army ; it soon spread about the town among all ranks ; but seems to have made no great progress in the country, till several years after the Union ; when the justices of peace, taking advantage of the act of parliament passed in the year 1727, for encouraging manufactures, zealously supported the manufacturers, by an impartial execution of the law, and by holding out premiums to the people.

The progress of that single manufacture is now very considerable ; besides large manufactories of threads, linen, tanning, and cotton, erected many years after that period. Happening to be in Aberdeen in 1758, I asked Bailie Dingwall of Rainiston, one of the principal stocking merchants of the place, to what amount they exported stockings annually ? he replied, to the amount of L. 80,000. Happening to be in the same place in 1784, I put the same question to Provost Auldjo, who assured me they exported the value of L. 200,000 yearly ; so rapid has been the progress of industry in that period. From the respectability of my authors, it need not be suspected I was imposed on. If we take into the account all the branches of manufacture carried on in that place, perhaps it is not wide of the truth, should we affirm, that the money returned by the labour of the poor greatly exceeds the whole land-rent of the county.

From hence arose the improved state of agriculture, especially the increased value of estates, and the rise of rents in that and its neighbouring counties on the south. These extensive counties, about

80 or 100 years ago, were over-run with small tenants, equally poor, ignorant, and obstinate, as ours now are; and no doubt would have continued in the same state till now, had not the gentlemen united in bodies to form regulations, in conformity to the acts encouraging manufactures, and divided themselves into committees for putting these regulations into execution. They encouraged industry, and frowned upon idleness. At every public meeting some local obstacle was removed, or some salutary regulation adopted. The landed and mercantile interest conspired in giving employment to the poor, who soon became sensible of the advantages held out to them. The county of Aberdeen, for instance, was divided into districts. Trysts, or markets, were instituted in each district, once a fortnight, where a merchant or manufacturer from Aberdeen gave regular attendance, to purchase all the yarn or stockings manufactured since the last market-day: For both kinds of manufacture were not admitted within the same district. When the native flax or wool was exhausted, he carried as much flax or wool to the tryst, to be distributed among the operators, as could be finished against the next market-day. This rotation was continued throughout the year, except about two months in harvest. I have reason to believe it is now in several instances discontinued: For the great proprietors, finding the spirit of industry gaining ground, erected villages up and down the country, as central points for collecting the industry of their respective neighbourhoods. A number

ber of tradesmen first settled in these villages. A manufacturer immediately came among them, to give employment to the families now settled, and the surrounding district. These villages, gradually peopled by the lower classes, have now become populous towns, and impress the traveller with the idea of cleanliness, health, and contentment. They serve as manufacturing colonies to Aberdeen, to which the united produce of their labour is conveyed by land-carriage for exportation.

For many years, little progress seems to have been made in the improvement of the soil, except by the proprietors themselves. Perhaps they neglected this branch too much ; or, their whole attention being turned to manufactures, they had not leisure for it. No doubt, a farmer now and then sprang up, with a larger capital, and a more liberal turn of mind than his neighbours ; but the great body of the people continued to follow the example of their ancestors, as many do to this day. But, in the mean time, they were enabled to pay higher rents, and live more comfortably than they formerly did. A man who pays from L. 10 to L. 15 or L. 20, expects that his wife and children, with a maid or two, will pay his rent, besides assisting him in his farm-labour ; by which means he can apply the produce of his farm to his other demands. A farmer of this description looks on his farm as a home, not as the subject whereon to support his family.

But since manufactures have become universal in that country, agriculture begins to flourish in a high degree.

degree. Farms are enlarged to any extent. Vast numbers of the poorer people have long ago settled in the villages, or the capital; and those now removed for enlarging the farms, make their escape to those asylums of industry and quiet, where their previous knowledge of manufacture enables them to live, perhaps more comfortably than they did on their farms. None of them ever thought of removing to America, or once leaving their native country.

Thus manufactures were introduced by great labour, attention, and perseverance, on the part of the proprietors of land. When introduced, they meliorated the state of the people in the mean time, enabled them to pay a higher rent, and at length put it in the power of the proprietors to enlarge their farms, and put them in a rational mode of cultivation, without depopulating the country, or subjecting an individual to a serious hardship.

When the gentlemen of the southern counties bent their thoughts to the improvement of their country, had they applied to agriculture alone, I fear they would have found insuperable obstacles in their way. The then race of farmers would not be easily prevailed on to relinquish their old habits. New farmers must be brought from the more improved countries; perhaps from England. Such a farmer must have good terms, and a long lease. Half a score of the native farmers must be removed, to make room for him. These could not settle in a town, they and their families having been bred to

agriculture alone ; of consequence, they must either starve, or retire to a more friendly soil than their native land. Suppose a whole county improved in this manner, to as high a degree as the soil is capable of, and no more of the old inhabitants retained than are sufficient to be servants to the improving farmers, the ground, no doubt, will yield a greater quantity of food, but it must be exported, because the country is comparatively depopulated. The rents must continue low, for two reasons : That the landholders will be at the mercy of a few great farmers ; and that the farmers cannot turn their industry to the same account they would do in a manufacturing country, where the towns give constant encouragement for fattening cattle, hogs, poultry, &c. as well as the immediate produce of the field. The farmer must export a great part of his produce in corn and lean cattle, the price of which must lose, at least, the expence of freight, and the profit of the exporting merchant.

But the gentlemen above alluded to formed a different plan. They taught their poor to work, and thereby enriched them in the first place. They reared villages for their reception, where they rendered them independent. Their own rents advanced in proportion to the growing opulence of the inhabitants. A constant demand from the villages for the necessaries of life, gave vigour to the efforts of the husbandman. Hence farms are gradually rendered more productive, to satisfy the growing demands of the manufacturer.

Perhaps

Perhaps it will be said, that this doctrine does not apply to us in this country : “ For we have all
 “ the encouragement we can desire, to improve our
 “ agriculture, without incurring the expence and
 “ labour necessary for introducing manufactures.
 “ Our grain and cattle find a ready market on every
 “ side, and a greater demand for both than we can
 “ answer. Why then should we take this round-
 “ about method of effecting what may be done in
 “ the course of a few years? It is our business to
 “ have a high rent-roll, and a well-paid rent, in as
 “ short a period of time as we can ; and the im-
 “ provement of agriculture is the most expeditious
 “ method of arriving at this end.” Be it so ; give
 agriculture every encouragement which emulation
 and interest can suggest. Endeavour to cause the
 people gain the premiums held out by public socie-
 ties. Spirit them up to become candidates, and
 lead them by the hand to merit them.

But I am afraid the progress will be small in our
 present circumstances. Our farms, for the most
 part, consist of from fifteen to forty acres ; the largest
 of which, under the present management, is too
 small for yielding a comfortable subsistence to a fa-
 mily, from its mere produce, after deducing an ade-
 quate rent to the landlord. The lands are open, and
 thereby incapable of being improved to the best
 account. The tenants are not able to inclose them,
 and their leases, in general, are too short for their
 attempting it. It would occasion an enormous ex-
 pence to the great proprietors, to divide their ex-

tended estates by inclosures ; and even were that done, it is a question whether the people could be prevailed on to relinquish their old habits, and take the full benefit of that improvement, by adopting the modern manners of farming. So that it is not likely that any solid improvement in agriculture will take place for a long time, under our present race of tenants. But though many obstacles stand in the way of their being made expert farmers, nothing hinders their being, by degrees, converted to manufacturers ; by which means they will be insensibly enriched. It does not signify by what particular species of industry a farmer's condition is meliorated, whether by the plough or spinning-wheel, provided he is made easier in his circumstances, and enabled to pay his rent duly at the term.

But should a precipitate desire of encouraging agriculture of a sudden, excite us to call for farmers from the south country, and parcel out whole estates to them, we shall immediately get a higher rent, and well paid ; for the farmer will raise and export more produce. But at what expence is this desirable object obtained ? It is not worth while for a south-country farmer to settle on less than from 200 to 500 acres. To accommodate him, from five to twenty families must be dismissed, of whom neither man, woman, or child, know any business, except the agriculture to which they have been accustomed. They cannot retire to a town, for there is no employment *there* for them. The only alternative to which they can have recourse,

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is either to leave the country, or be wedged in to some other corner of the estate, where they are like to come to poverty themselves, and hurt those of whose lands they have got a share. This is verified in the few sheep-farms we have. The old inhabitants are scattered up and down the country, in a declining state, and a dead weight upon others.

Small as our farms are in general, there is no point occasions so much difficulty to a humane landlord, at a set, as to accommodate the whole of his tenants, by an equitable division of his lands amongst them: So numerous are the people at present. But their condition must be much more uneasy and unhappy, if a few great farmers shall cram and pack them together in a smaller space, where they have neither room nor opportunity to exert their usual industry, or employ the little capital they have.

It may not, indeed, be amiss to introduce a few farmers of this description, to show what the soil and the climate are capable of; and to teach such as may be disposed to follow their example, how to bring their lands to the best account. But it will depopulate the country, and render the present inhabitants miserable, should the humour become general.

The permanent strength of a country depends on the number of its inhabitants: the riches of a country arise from the industry of the lower orders. The first object, therefore, of a well-regulated state or country, is to keep their people at home, and to put

put work in their hands, whereby they can be useful to themselves and society. Our southern neighbours have attended to those principles, and acted upon them. No corner of the kingdom stands more in need of attention, in this respect, than we do. We have a great number of strong travelling beggars, and their children capable, if taught, of earning at least a part of their own bread, whose maintenance operates as another land-tax. We have immense numbers of mailers or cottagers, whose children, together with those of the common farmers, are a burden to the parents, till they are ten or twelve years of age; and during that early period, contract habits of idleness and vice, which seldom forsake them. In other countries, children are taught to work from four years of age. Their literary and operative education alternately occupy their whole time; and thence, instead of being a burden to the public, as with us, by early habits of industry and virtue, they become valuable members of society, in any department they occupy. From a late judicious pamphlet * on this subject, it appears, "that in Hertfordshire, the cottages of the poor contain nearly as many wheels as inhabitants: That jersey, or worsted spinning, is the employment of young and old, male and female; in consequence of this, children are a source of profit to a Hertfordshire labourer:

* An Account of the Origin, Proceedings, and Intentions of the Society, for the promotion of Industry, in the southern district of the parts of Lindsey, in the County of Lincoln.

“ labourer : That employing boys in this manner,
 “ by no means disqualifies them for the work of the
 “ field afterwards ; for it is well known, that no part
 “ of the kingdom is cultivated with more activity,
 “ or greater success, than the county of Hertford.”

It also appears from the same pamphlet, that a society instituted in the county of Lincoln, (where their poor seem to have been nearly as idle as ours), has introduced regularity and industry among them from the year 1783, when the institution took place, to 1789, to that degree, that numbers of children, under twelve years of age, earned 5d. a-day, at an average, at their wheels ; or 2s. 6d. a-week, in the dreary winter-months.

The counties of Ross and Cromarty consist of thirty-two parishes, which contain at least 50,000 souls. Of these there may be 12,000 young women, above eight years of age, who, in the course of ten years, may be taught to earn from 4d. to 5d. a-day. Before that period, several may arrive at that slight of hand, as to spin at the rate of from 8d. to 1s. a-day, as a great number of girls in Aberdeenshire now do. In ten years more, the number of spinners may be estimated at 18,000, as the old slip off the stage, and the rising generation is taught. But let us take the first number :—at 4d. a-day, for nine months, they will earn L. 46,800 :—at 5d. the amount is L. 58,500 ; which is a considerable part of the land-rent of both counties, and perhaps a greater sum than mere attention to agriculture alone will produce a century hence. No man who has attend-
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ed to this object in the manufacturing counties, will say that this calculation is exaggerated. Such a sum annually introduced into the country, through the lower classes, would warm and refresh every member of the political body, in its ascent to the upper end of society, where it would naturally center at last.

Let it not be objected, that we cannot spare our women nine months of the year from our farm-labour. In the southern counties, where agriculture is carried on with success, women do not execute any part of the work, except shearing in harvest, and weeding lint, turnip, or potatoes, for a few days. Their women and boys are employed in manufactures alone. Boys herding cattle in the open field, are knitting stockings, or working lace, as diligently as if they sat within doors. No sooner do the men give up work, especially in the long winter-nights, than they begin to knit, spin, reel yarn, or do the drudgery of the family, to keep their women at work. It is the study of man, woman, and child, to forward the manufacture. This, being matter of fact, shews to what useful purpose the labour of our poor may be converted.

Were a desire of improving their own circumstances by industry universally impressed upon them, there is no saying what might be the amount of it at last, among such a multitude of people. No doubt, we should find it eligible at first, to sell our yarn to our southern neighbours, till our people should spin such a quantity as should make it worth our while

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to erect buildings for working it up to the last stage ; by which means, others would reap more benefit from our labour than ourselves. But how soon our quantity of yarn should encourage us to bring the manufacture to the last stage for exportation, the annual return from industry would be indefinite. The above sum of L. 58,500 would be a considerable acquisition to the country. Supposing the yarn spun to be from flax ; were that yarn wove and bleached, it would return triple that sum, or L. 175,500, for mere labour, exclusive of the value of the raw materials.

Nature has bestowed upon us advantages for trade, which no other part of Scotland enjoys in so high a degree, except perhaps the banks of the Forth and the Clyde. The Friths of Beaully, Dingwall, and Dornock, affording every where harbours and water-carriages, penetrate twenty or thirty miles, to the heart of the country, from the German Ocean, as so many canals formed by the hand of Nature, inviting the merchant and manufacturer to settle on their banks ; besides numberless harbours on the west coast, and island of Lewis. Nothing shows the convenience of water-carriage in this country to more advantage, than that the greater number of gentlemen's seats are near the shore ; and only two are above seven miles distant from it ; by which means the expensive land-carriage is saved to us, to which the southern counties are exposed.

By introducing manufactures, we should be enabled to pay for our foreign necessities and luxuries;

by the labour of our poor. We buy up annually an immense quantity of cotton fabrics : that, together with English cloths, grocery goods, wines, and other liquors, hard-ware, &c. besides the money annually spent by our people of fortune, in the Metropolis, amounts to such a sum, that it is wonderful how our produce of corn, cattle, and fish, can answer for it. By these outlets, we assist in enriching the manufacturers of other countries, and leave little or no money among ourselves, when our accounts are paid. But if we set our poor to work, we should indeed have but little of the produce of labour at our outset, to balance our imports ; but it would increase gradually every year, till at length, were our people fully instructed, we, as well as our neighbours, should have the value of our whole produce, perhaps much more, remaining among ourselves, as a capital for further improvement, after paying by labour for our foreign goods. I call all goods imported foreign, for which we have nothing to give in return, except produce or cash.

Manufactures would increase our population. If a populous country is idle, the more populous it is, the poorer it becomes. If it be industrious, the more populous, the richer it is ; and the richer it is, the more populous it shall grow. Industry and population mutually support each other. No country in the world, of its extent, contains so much riches and people as Holland ; both originating in the industry of the inhabitants. The produce of the ground is the only support of our people ; and the culture
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of it, the only labour to which they are bred : we have already but too many mouths for consuming what falls to their share of the produce, after paying the rents ; and too many hands for labouring the ground, in the slovenly manner it is executed. If we wish to retain our people, we seem already at the highest possible pitch of population, while we trust merely to the produce of the soil for their support : for a young man cannot marry, without some land whereon to settle ; and there is the greatest difficulty in finding such a situation. But were manufactures established, our young men would find employment, whether they got lands or not. How soon they found themselves capable of supporting a family, they would marry, and rear useful children, to add to the riches and strength of their country.

Our boroughs and villages would be peopled with useful inhabitants. We find in our boroughs, shopkeepers to import foreign goods, and export cash only in return ; writers and messengers looking for employment ; a few indolent tradesmen ; many tippling houses ; and a few men sauntering up and down the street, apparently at a loss how to dispose of themselves. Instead of this, we should see large manufacturing and store houses erected ; every individual employed in some useful labour ; constant work for the poor ; and advantages held out to them to remove thither.

Our agriculture would flourish, in proportion as manufactures would remove the obstacles to it now subsisting. Our poor, finding other employment

besides agriculture, would confine themselves to small crofts, or remove to towns and villages. A growing annual capital would remain in the country, after paying for our foreign goods, for improving our waste lands. The constant demand from the towns and cottagers would excite the ingenuity and industry of the farmer. Our produce would be enlarged to an indefinite extent:—the value of estates would increase:—rents would rise, and be well paid, in proportion to the progress of industry.

Manufactures create a third class in society, which, in every manufacturing country, furnishes the most spirited improvers of the soil, especially of waste ground. At present we have, with a few exceptions, only two classes; proprietors of land, and labourers. The first class, comparatively few, however diligent, can improve but a small part of their estates. The other class, the numerous, removed at an awful distance from the first, is too poor, and too much confined by heavy rents, to think of improvement. A silent opposition of sentiment, and interest, hinders their agreeing in united efforts for improving the soil. The landlord, on a rise of rent, gives a short lease, that he may, as soon as possible, have a similar augmentation on the next lease. On the other hand, the tenant, imagining that his landlord has his own interest solely in view, endeavours to make a livelihood by his land, during the lease, by scourging the ground already in culture; but is afraid to make it better, or bring waste ground into culture, for fear that another may dispossess him

him at the end of the lease, or that he be obliged to pay a heavier augmentation than before. Hence arises the general poverty of the tenants, and their complaints against the landlords for over-stretching the rents on short leases. The landlords, on the other hand, tax them with being idle, restive, and backward to improve; and therefore that they cannot be trusted with long leases. Perhaps the complaints on both sides have some foundation, and exaggerated by each party. But manufactures create an intermediate rank in society, betwixt proprietors of land and labourers, composed of merchants, opulent farmers, and manufacturers; which rank, by showing the lower class to what a creditable station industry may raise a man, creates in them an emulation to excel; and by good sense and usefulness, having access to the higher class, is as it were a mediating power or bond of union betwixt both. This class of men, bred to unremitting industry from their youth, are peculiarly fond of laying out what money they can spare from trade in improving the ground. I am told, that the manufacturers of Glasgow and Paisley have improved large tracts of waste ground in that country. It is well known, that within four or five miles of Aberdeen was the bleakest and most barren part of the country; an acre of which did not yield 1d. In the last forty years, manufacturers have fued all this space from the proprietors, and scattered elegant villas over the whole extent of that once barren territory; which now yields from 30s. to L. 3 an acre. Manufacturers

manufacturers have cultivated more waste ground in that country, and to better purpose, than all our mailers shall improve for a century hence. It is a common saying with them, " Give me space, and I shall make land."

Another benefit would arise from a spirited extension of manufactures, sensibly felt by our southern neighbours, viz. that our young men of education and spirit would find employment at home. We should not be under the necessity of sending them to the East or West Indies, where the climate destroys at least three of every four; while our young women, who have not even that outlet, languish in solitude at home. Did we possess flourishing manufactures, our young men would find fortunes in their native country, and our young women husbands. The middle rank in society would arise, intelligent and enterprising, which would open up new sources of industry and wealth.

But with all our natural advantages and prospects, I know of no attempt made by common consent for employing the poor. Individuals, indeed, have come forward, and shown what success may be expected from united efforts. Mr Ross of Cromarty, many years ago, erected a hempen manufacture in that place, which still flourishes, and is of great service in that part of the country. Colonel Mackenzie of Seaforth has built ten school-houses in the different districts of the island of Lewis; has brought expert mistresses from different places, to teach the spinning of lint, at an yearly salary; purchased wheels

wheels and reels for the schools; engaged a company in Aberdeen to supply flax, and receive the yarn; and pays an annual salary to an overseer for superintending the whole. He has lately erected three or four schools on the same plan, on his estates of Kintail and Lochalsh. His Lady, for several years back, has superintended the education of the rising generation at these schools, with maternal attention. By emulation, premiums, and every soothing art which can prevail on young minds, she has the pleasure of having taught from six to seven hundred young girls, the greater number under twelve years of age; many of whom spin to the amount of 4d. or 5d. a-day; by which means they assist in supporting their parents, to many of whom they were formerly a burden. It is probable, that the number of spinners will so far increase in a few years, that a manufacturer will find the benefit of settling amongst them, and giving additional vigour to their industry. It is said, that Mr Urquhart of Braelangwell, is erecting buildings for carrying on a woollen manufacture. Every patriot will wish him success.

But if ever industry be introduced, so as to become of universal and common benefit, the design must originate with the gentlemen at large, and be carried on by common concert. The individual efforts of a few can have only a partial effect, and are exposed to many adverse chances, to which the unanimous design of a great number of enlightened minds is not liable; at least it will take a very long time before the unassisted efforts of individuals can prevade the body of the people, in such an extend-
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ed scattered country as this is. The united mass of the knowledge and ability of the many, directed to one point, can alone insure success.

It is true, the enterprise is arduous—experience is to be acquired—rational plans to be formed—prejudices to be removed—even the shafts of malice and envy to be blunted—expence to be incurred—and the whole to be conducted with steadiness and unremitting perseverance. But the object is great, and success in such hands is sure. Every manufacturing country, both in Scotland and England, had once to struggle with the same difficulties which now stand in our way; confident of the same success, what should hinder us from using the same means? No object can be greater, or more pleasing, than mercy to the poor; especially when combined, as in this case, with the solid and permanent interest of the proprietors themselves. It is the highest office of humanity, to rescue thousands of our fellow-creatures from poverty, ignorance, idleness, and the sordid vices issuing from these sources. No charity is so effectual and steady in its operation, as that whereby they are reformed from the vices peculiar to their station, and enabled to earn comfortable subsistence to themselves. Hardly can any look for a higher reward in a future state. I am willing to hope that every individual proprietor of land, and every other person in easy circumstances among us, will cheerfully contribute to so laudable an undertaking; were it once proposed, and a feasible plan formed. We cannot once imagine, that any man

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of liberal education will so far disregard every circumstance respecting those fellow-creatures, by whose painful labour he and his ancestors have been supported, except the due payment of his rents, and the enlargement of his rent-roll. Let us therefore assure ourselves, that every man will be disposed to forward so good a work, in proportion to his ability ; and that nothing is wanting, but that it be proposed by a few men of property and influence in the country.

But should such a man as above described be actually found, as among so great a number there may be a few more selfish than their neighbours, yet they cannot surely be insensible to their own interest, and that of their family, which is intimately connected with the introduction of manufactures : for a man cannot lay up a surer fund for posterity, than a moderate sum for accomplishing this object. The general industry of the southern counties has already been the cause of a general rise of rent among us, by advancing the price of all the necessaries of life. But it is difficult to say how much higher they may rise, did the annual influx of riches double, triple, or quadruple the capital of the lower classes. Hence it may be affirmed, should a moderate sum be necessary for introducing industry, it is as sure a fund laid in for posterity, and will make, as quick a return, as an equal sum laid out in plantations, or any other improvement of that kind. Besides that, the expenditure will be accompanied by the

most exquisite of all pleasures, the pleasure of blessing thousands.

Were we to address the Ladies apart from the Gentlemen, we need only mention the design, to engage them in its favour. Nothing can be more congenial to the softness and sensibility of their sex, than to use their influence in training up the cold hand of indigence to support its owner ; to infuse joy and gladness into the heart of the widow, fatherless, and orphan, by enabling them, by their own labour, to replenish their solitary hut with food and clothing ; to rescue thousands of poor children from the nastiness, ignorance, idleness, and especially from the vices, incident to their depressed station ; such as, lying, pilfering, low cunning and deceit, which grow with their growth, and strengthen with their strength. Hence the grovelling vices of the lower orders are cause of universal complaint. Though we have many institutions for teaching the moral virtues, yet the general idleness in which poor children are brought up is a practical antidote to every principle we can inculcate, as the best inclined child, by being idle, lies open to the advice and example of the most abandoned. That charity, therefore, resembles the goodness of the universal Parent, that would nip these vices in the bud ; by employing their whole time betwixt industry and religion—qualifying them to be honest servants—respectable heads of families, who would transmit their good example to posterity, and enjoy the prospect of a comfortable old age. The fair sex,
raised

raised by Providence to the upper end of society, never appear in a more amiable point of view, than when thus employed in imitating the great Author of perfection and beauty. It has been uniformly observed, that any design in which the Ladies heartily engage generally succeeds. Did they deign to take the design of this paper under their patronage, I should rest satisfied of its success.

Two important questions now present themselves to our view, viz. What species of manufacture ought to be introduced? and, What methods are to be used for its encouragement? The answer to the first depends on a complex view of local circumstances. The dispositions and general habits of the people are to be consulted. The ease or difficulty of finding the raw material, and the markets for their labour, are to be considered. In one point of view, the linen manufacture seems to bid fair for preference. The people are in the use of raising small patches of flax, which they manufacture into coarse cloth for home-consumption. It is probable they will be easier taught that branch than any other with which they are unacquainted. Perhaps were lint-feed afforded them *gratis*, or at a reduced price, that would encourage them to raise a greater quantity, and excite their industry. But to this manufacture it is objected, that it has been found, from the experience of our neighbours, we cannot raise flax sufficient for employing our people, and must therefore be at the mercy of foreigners for the raw material; whereas, were the woollen ma-

nufacture adopted, our own country would soon produce wool, to any extent required, by the extension of sheep-farms. The sheep-farms already established in these two counties, contain 46,000 sheep. At 1s. each fleece, we export the value of L. 2300 of wool. Were this wool manufactured by ourselves, it would return at least L. 6900, by which L. 4600 would be gained by mere labour. But which manufacture, upon the whole, ought to have the preference, I shall leave to abler heads than mine to determine. I cannot, however, help supposing, that one manufacture only ought to have public encouragement, that the public attention may not be distracted by separate objects; and that the manufacture condescended on should be the simplest and easiest executed that can be devised. The inhabitants on the west coast may, without doubt, raise flax, and manufacture linen for their own consumpt; but if they attempt a manufacture for exportation, stockings seem the best adapted to their circumstances. The people lead the primitive pastoral life. The boys and girls tending the cattle, and the women in the summer-sheels, could knit a great number of stockings, without prejudice to their ordinary employment.

I shall not pretend to give a detail of the proper steps for introducing and encouraging a manufacture. Should the Gentlemen form a serious resolution to this effect, no doubt they will appoint a committee to receive information from the manufacturing counties, to make application to Government, and

and other public boards, for such encouragement as can be obtained ; and from thence digest a plan for general approbation. The united efforts of so many enlightened minds, zealous in the cause of humanity and their country, will soon form a rational plan, practicable in the execution.

We have many publications recommending manufactures, and giving general directions for encouraging them. For the linen manufacture, I know none better than that published in the year 1736, under the title of *The Interest of Scotland considered*. But I have met with none which furnishes such sensible hints, for the detail of an infant manufacture, as the pamphlet above referred to, in which it appears how far the industry, morals, and almost the character of a people, may be improved in a few years, by the public spirit, good sense, and unremitting perseverance of men of liberal minds, in the higher ranks of life.

I have now given my sentiments on the improvement wanted in this country, in as plain a manner as I can. I may be wrong in some things ; but the design in general is good, and the intention is, at any rate, innocent. I do not wish to intrude my own particular opinions on any man ; far less to dictate to so great a number of men of learning and influence. My humble walk in life forbids such petulant interference. The opportunity I have had, for nearly forty years back, of observing the poverty, idleness, and vices of the lower orders, made me long ago turn my thoughts to this subject. I have frequently brought it forward in conversation with
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men in the higher departments of life, who uniformly approved of my ideas ; but unhappily the matter went no farther than the amusement of an evening. Every year since that period, luxury has been gaining ground ; that is, a greater number of expensive articles have been annually imported, while the exports were nearly stationary. To answer this extra-demand, the rents have been doubled, tripled, or quadrupled, while too few efforts have been made to teach the poor tenant to pay them. They have been left to the silent operation of the increase of manufactures and trade in the southern counties, which has raised the price of all the necessaries of life, and consequently brought a higher price to this country for its produce. But it is matter of doubt, whether the increase of price bears a proportion to the increase of rent. If it does not, then the people must gradually become poorer than they were. In fact, the account given by Sir John Sinclair, in his Report, by no means gives a favourable idea of their circumstances. I fear it is perfectly just ; and that their poverty will continue to increase, till they are either banished from their country by great farmers, or enabled to live in it, by having their children taught to support themselves. It is true, the uncommon prices for grain and cattle, for two years back, have given a breathing to the farmer. But that sudden and extravagant rise must proceed from some violent cause ; which, when removed by a peace, or otherwise, will leave matters in much the same state as it found them.

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My feelings alone for the poor have prevailed on me to give this trouble. I wish to act only in the character of a humble unknown prompter. It will, however, give me heart-felt pleasure, should the Gentlemen take up the matter on its own intrinsic merit, and treat it with that seriousness, which the dictates of humanity, the prosperity of their country, and their own particular interest, demand. They will, in the first place, reap the approbation of their own consciences; they will forward the interest of their own families; the blessing of thousands, otherwise ready to perish, will follow them beyond the grave; and the God of love will, in due time, reward their labour of love.

I am now at that time of life, that I can sacrifice the approbation of my friends, to be freed from the censures of the selfish, and therefore send you this by a friend; you are at liberty to make what use of it your own good sense shall dictate.

I am,

Sir,

Your most humble servant,

JOHN DOWNIE.

URRAY, }
Aug. 28. 1796. }

P. S. To open an easy communication to the different corners of a country, is the foundation of every solid improvement; without which, no effectual

tual reformation can take place. The direction of new roads, marked in the chart of the northern counties, prefixed to the Report, seems the best that can be adopted for that purpose ; at least it seems the best for opening a communication betwixt the east and west seas in this county. It would contribute greatly to the benefit and comfort of the inhabitants, that these roads were soon opened.

Another material object towards improvement, is the erection of bridges. It is irksome, as well as inconvenient, when Government has provided travellers with bridges from the metropolis to Inverness, that it has hitherto neglected to erect bridges on the great military road leading from thence through Ross, Cromarty, Sutherland, and Caithness ; counties that in the present and former wars have merited at the hand of Government, by raising several regiments, as effective as any in his Majesty's service. Bridges on Beauly, Connin, and Helmsdale, I am told, would open the communication to the Pentland Frith. If the northern counties and boroughs would join in representing the expediency of this measure, no doubt Government would give attention to their request.

F I N I S.



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